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HOSPITAL AND TRAINING SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

IN CHARGE OF

MARY M. RIDDLE, R.N.

INVENTIONS BY NURSES

No more timely suggestion and stimulus for nurses has recently been presented than that of the prize¹ to be given to nurses at the San Francisco Exposition by Miss Delano for inventions that shall contribute to the care and comfort of the sick, either in their homes or in the hospitals. Every nurse knows of simple or complex devices she has originated either to increase the efficiency of her work or to economize work and thus prolong her own efficiency, or to render her patient more comfortable, or safer or better in some one particular. If each nurse so doing could be persuaded to compete for the prize offered and enter her invention, however simple, and if these inventions could all be on exhibition during the Exposition in San Francisco, it would be impossible to estimate the amount of good accomplished.

It not infrequently happens that certain expensive appliances are beyond the reach of a patient in his home (nothing is supposed to be beyond the reach of hospitals) and the nurse must improvise something. It is this very improvisation that is wanted and let it be distinctly understood that it would be equally acceptable to hospitals.

Every purchaser of supplies and appliances for the hospital is accustomed to this remark from the visiting agent:

And for this simple attachment we are indebted to a nurse, Miss So and So who suggested it, with the remark that our appliance would be almost perfect if such and such a difficulty could be overcome and she believed it could be done in this way. We were glad to try it and she has been found to be correct.

Each time this occurs the inventive genius of a nurse is proved anew and why should it not be so if there is any truth in the old saw, that "Necessity is the mother of invention," for who has more necessities than one who cares for the sick and these necessities must be met in some way, consequently the nurse sets her wits to work and proceeds to meet them. Therefore there must be a large number who can compete if they will and this is a petition that they may be disposed to do so. Anything that has proved useful to one is almost sure to fit a like need for another.

¹ Due to war conditions this plan has been abandoned.—EDITOR.

A few examples of the ways in which nurses have helped themselves may call to the minds of others instances of needs satisfied by a little ingenuity, and create a desire to give the results for the benefit of fellow nurses and the sick in their care.

A nurse in a large hospital, where a great number of restless children formed the constant supply of patients, deplored the fact that it was almost impossible, with the means at hand, to restrain them sufficiently to ensure their own safety without hindering their freedom of motion to the point of injury. She accordingly studied the situation and after repeated trials evolved a restraining jacket that met the requirements and has proved most useful to that hospital and its little patients and has also been copied over and over again in other institutions until, after twenty years of use, the originator of the pattern has been lost to sight, but the device continues to furnish comfort and safety to hundreds of sick children.

One of the pleasantest sick rooms ever seen was situated in a lodging house; the patient, a woman suffering with pneumonia, lay upon a folding bed which, when closed, resembled a high wardrobe and therefore had a very high head-board. Everything about the room indicated care and thought and every article was disposed with the idea of promoting the patient's well-being and happiness. It was impossible to keep the patient out of the draught when either window was open, but by the skilful arrangement of an umbrella, away from her line of vision, a window could be kept open constantly and the air kept pure.

One small closet in the room did not furnish space for the various utensils and medicines required and the nurse was not fortunate enough to have the use of the bath-room solely for her patient, so she improvised by placing the bed diagonally across a corner of the room, thus securing some space behind the head of it and out of sight of either the patient or a chance visitor. Here she arranged a little table to hold all medicines and utensils; she drove two tacks in the woodwork of the wrong side of the bed's head-board and between them stretched a stout cord, thus making a line upon which to hang towels, wash cloth, etc. A stranger, unacquainted with the facts, could never have guessed the "makeshifts" the room contained, for nothing was visible except the furniture, etc., of a well-appointed room inhabited by a refined woman.

Verily, the nurse possessing such ingenuity could invent some appliance which should be for the permanent good of the sick; some head rest that should be comfortable, sanitary, and not too costly, or some support that should enable a patient to maintain the Fowler's

position without an effort. These things are needed. Hospital supply houses furnish them to some extent but they are not within the reach of all.

A model which should show the possibility of giving a patient a full bath in bed is demanded. Nurses have been known to make a bath tub with the patient in bed by putting an extra large rubber army blanket under the patient in the same way that the under sheet is put in position, and then placing a framework made of four boards, five or six inches in width, securely joined at the corners and large enough to enclose a space of the shape and size of the top of the mattress. This is placed on the edge on the mattress so that it surrounds the patient and comes well under the army blanket which reaches over its edges and forms a very good water-tight bath tub that can easily be filled by pouring water into it and can be emptied by a syphon. While this answers the purpose it is unwieldly and ought to be simplified. A folding tub of some kind ought to be originated and no doubt could be by a nurse who not only saw but felt the existing need.

How to secure ventilation in rooms where such a process is difficult; how to retain the heat of the continuous drip enema; how to make simple appliances for relieving pressure; how to make bandages and splints of different kinds—all these are practical subjects upon which any nurse might well fix her attention with the idea of solving some of the problems presented by them.

There is also much to be learned from observation of the methods of business men and women. Owing to the high cost of material as well as of time, the successful business man is constrained to watch every output, even the time and energy of clerks and other employees; consequently he has devised ways of keeping records and accounts that eliminate duplication, and yet are efficient. Why could not some of these methods be studied with a view to originating others adapted to the use of training schools for nurses.

A business man, a hospital trustee, once called upon a superintendent of nurses and found her covering pages with writing by her own hand. He noticed the process and inquired into it. He said:

The time for that has gone by and if you are to live and do business in the present time there must be something done which shall eliminate this and which shall simplify all your methods.

He advised and they together devised a system of records that are well suited to the needs of that particular school.

Thus it seems that there is a demand for thought and study upon these matters and it remains for the nurses to decide whether the demand shall be met by an adequate supply.